NEWS-LETTER

of the

CONFERENCE ON LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION

* *

Double Number 5-6 Volume I November, 1951

* *

I am not mad: I would to Heaven I were!
For then 'tis like I should forget myself:
O! if I could, what grief should I forget.

—King John, Act III, Scene 4

This, our first pre-Convention issue, is of unusual size and importance. Our members and subscribers will agree that its bulk requires us to consider it a double issue, concluding our subscription for the year. We omit, by necessity, the usual installment of our running bibliography, but we include our convention program, the paper by Professor Griffin upon which our Conference will be based, and the usual addendum to our ever-growing list of subscribers. The promised installment of Work in Progress will appear in the first issue of the new year.

Our leading conference paper is reproduced here in mimeographed form, instead of being read at the December meeting, pursuant to the strict rules of MLA. These rules expressly prohibit the reading of formal papers at Conferences such as ours, and the officers of the Association have not considered favorably our request to be granted formal status as a Discussion Group. "On the other hand," as the rules set forth in PMLA, September, 1951, page xiv, specifically provide, "the mimeographing and advance circulation of papers or reports will be within the spirit of the arrangement." This can be done economically only through the medium of a co-operative NEWS-LETTER such as this one.

In view of the expressed wish of the Conference to devote our second meeting to "a critique of psychoanalytic studies of literature," Dr. William J. Griffin of Peabody College has consented to accept the responsibility for preparing the critique which we publish in this issue, and Dr. Carvel Collins of M. I. T. has agreed to lead the discussion which will be based on Dr. Griffin's remarks. Discussion will then continue from the floor in more impromptu fashion, and those who wish to continue beyond the period scheduled may huddle on the mezzanine as usual.

Subscribers and former members are urged to write promptly for reservations as soon as the official program of the Convention is issued. We anticipate requests in excess of the number of places allotted to us pursuant to MLA rules.

L. F. M.

Bibliography (IV)

We acknowledge with gratitude the receipt of off-prints of articles recently published by two of our physician-subscribers. They are:

Edmund Bergler - "Literary Critics Who Can Spell But Not Read" (1951), from American Imago, Volume 8, no. 2. Dr. Bergler analyzes under various headings the critical reactions to the publication of his book, The Writer and Psychoanalysis. "Critics" analyzed range from Walter Winchell to Bernard De Voto.

David Beres - "A Dream, a Vision, and a Poem: A Psycho-Analytic Study of the Origins of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1951), from The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, Volume XXXII, Part II.

TENTATIVE AGENDA

of the

SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY

To be held at the meeting of the Modern Language Association of America on Friday, December 28th, 1951, from 11 A. M. to 12:30 P. M. at the Hotel Statler in Detroit, Michigan.

1. Continuance of Organization

Question: Shall we continue the meetings of a group to discuss the relationships between literature and psychology, in the form of a Conference or of a Discussion Group, if approved by the officers of MLA.

2. Permanent Organization

If it is the wish of those present, the chairman will entertain a motion that a nominating committee be appointed from those in attendance, to present a ticket for chairman, secretary, and steering committee for 1952, for election by those in attendance at the close of the meeting.

3. THE USE AND ABUSE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

Presentation by Professor William J. Griffin, Peabody College, based on the mimeographed paper distributed before the Conference.

4. Discussion

Led by Professor Carvel Collins, M. I. T., in a prepared commentary on Dr. Griffin's remarks. Thereafter additional discussion will follow from the floor. Each speaker from the floor will be limited to four or five minutes in all.

5. Recommendations

Shall the News-Letter be continued? Are there any suggestions as to its future form and contents? Shall there be a specific topic for the next annual meeting, if any?

6. The Election

Slates to be presented by the nominating committee, if No. 2, above, is recommended by the Conference.

7. Adjournment

Officers for the 1951 meeting:

Chairman: Roy P. Basler
Secretary: Leonard F. Manheim
Steering Committee: Eleanor L. Nicholes
Wayne Burns

The Use and Abuse of Psychoanalysis in the Study of Literature[1]

by William J. Griffin

The alliance between literature and the study of human psychology is ancient and honorable. It is also inevitable, for the writer perforce makes a report on the nature of his own psyche, while at the same time he may, with varying degrees of accuracy, set down reports on manifestations of that of his fellowman. And in the mind of the reader what he writes has meaning.

It follows that the study of literature is centrally concerned with the understanding of psychology.[2] Surely, any new evidence about the nature of the psyche or any new insights into its modes of activity should be welcomed and put to use by students of literature.

Such new evidence and insights have been offered in our own day by Freud and his successors. Numerous scholars and critics have indeed welcomed and exploited them. Further, the impact of ideas traceable in part at least to psychoanalysis has been registered even by those who have been skeptical of the new science, or who have not been consciously interested in it.[3]

Certain areas of literary study, it is true, appear to have especially benefited from the suggestions of psychoanalysis. Aesthetic theory and the understanding of the creative act, for example, have been partially rescued from the realm of cloud and chaos. As Richard Chase has remarked, "Aside

---

1. The terms "psychoanalysis" and "psychoanalytic," the reader should be warned, will be used rather loosely in this paper to refer to any of various sets of theories and methods relating to the study of the psyche that grew out of Freud's researches into the unconscious.

2. These preliminary statements are so obvious that there would seem no point in them had not René Wellek and Austin Warren in their influential compendium, The Theory of Literature (New York, 1949), pp. 75–88, argued the case for an extremely narrow conception both of "psychology" and what "belongs to literary study."

3. John Livingston Lowes and Caroline Spurgeon come readily to mind as examples.

from Freudian psychology, we do not have in our current literary criticism any working idea of the imagination."[4] If Freudians have had more to say of the wound than of the marvelous bow, and if they have been more willing to explore the likenesses between dreams and the work of art than to take account of the differences, their contributions have yet been substantial. They have widely commanded respect, and as long as the discussions have remained on the level of general theory the issues raised have been debated with good will. A fair statement of the situation is made by Lionel Trilling, who, while he points out some of the shortcomings to which the Freudian view may seem predisposed, also emphasizes the immense advantages in the fact that "of all mental systems, the Freudian psychology is the one which makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind."[5]

Increased knowledge of the constitution of the mind has had the specific effect of opening up new explorations of the functions of imagery and symbols, and the significance of myths and folklore. I shall later have something to say about abuses of symbols, and there may be reason to suspect some investigators of confusing the mythic with the mystic, but the point to be made here is that impressive studies using the suggestions of psychoanalysis have been made under the most respectable auspices.

Again, as one might expect, modern psychology figures prominently in the discussions of modern literature. No consideration of Faulkner's As I Lay Dying would be complete without some attention to Freudian ideas; no analy-

---

4. Richard Chase, "Myth Revisited," Partisan Review, XVII (1950), 891.
5. Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1951), p. 52.

sis of O'Neill's Lazarus Laughed could afford to neglect those of Jung. In the study of such writers as Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Kafka, and Thomas Mann, some use of a knowledge of psychoanalytic theory and practice is naturally expected and highly valued.[6]

It is evident that in a sense it is true that "to clamor for critical recognition of psychoanalysis ... is to knock at an open door."[7] Yet it is equally true that the critic is regarded with suspicion when he attempts to apply psychoanalysis to the works of writers who knew not Freud. Particularly in the academic world, suspicious to studies of contemporary use of the new concepts in psychology, the application of those concepts to the pre-Freudian writer is regarded with a dropping eye. And the distrust appears to increase as the study becomes less general and more specific and detailed.

To identify the ideas an author consciously made use of, to judge the accuracy of his understanding of those ideas, and to gauge the literary effect of his employment of them are, however, traditional tasks of the critic. Much more exciting are the possibilities offered by the new psychology in the pursuit of things unattempted yet in criticism. Perhaps it is the adventure of such pursuit that has attracted so many, both literary men and professional psychologists, to undertake it.[8] I cannot claim to have had the opportunity to assess more than a sampling of the results, but even a

---

6. Frederick J. Hoffman, in Freudianism and the Literary Mind (Baton Rouge, 1945), has discussed at length the effects of psychoanalysis on modern literature and, as a consequence, the critic's necessary concern with them.

7. Harry Levin, "Clinical Demonstrations on Four Poets," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXII (January 1, 1949), 15.

8. So far as I know, there exists no comprehensive bibliography of this subject, though the running bibliographies in the Newsletter of the Conference on Literature and Psychology may provide a basis for such a compilation. The file of Psychological Abstracts shows a steadily increasing number of studies of literature.

limited acquaintance with the published accounts has suggested some reasons for the reservations with which they have often been received.

Some frequently heard explanations for dissatisfaction ought, I think, to be discounted. Least significant of all is the supposition that it is illogical to apply Freudian psychology to, let us say, the work of Shakespeare because Shakespeare predated Freud by three hundred years. The implication would be that Freud created men instead of studying them, or that Shakespeare was not a man as other men are, or that he was incapable of registering his own impressions of his fellowmen. An almost equally absurd suggestion is that the psychological patterns in Shakespeare's writings are explained by Timothy Bright, not by Freud. These allegations cannot be taken seriously, surely, even by those who give voice to them.

A more reasonable objection is sometimes raised against the "jargon" of psychoanalysis in literary studies.[9] Annoyance is understandable when a reader finds that he has only been told in unfamiliar terms what he already knew. Exercises in verbalization, of course, will not command respect. The offense is compounded by the critic whose knowledge is little and whose desire for display is great.[10]

The barrier of a specialized vocabulary may, of course, be raised by the writer who has a genuine desire to make a contribution.[11] But it is reasonable to expect a new science to develop terminology indispensable to

---

9. See, for example, Leo A. Spiegel, "The New Jargon: Psychology in Literature," Sewanee Review, XL (1932), 476-491

10. Leonard Manheim has discussed this subject in The Dickens Pattern (Unpublished Columbia Ph.D. dissertation, 1948), pp. 3-7.

11. Excellent advice on the matter is given to "psychocritics" by Leon Edel in "Notes on the Use of Psychological Tools in Literary Scholarship," Newsletter of the Conference on Literature and Psychology, No. 4 (September, 1951), 3.

the application of its concepts. Students of literature, fond of digging into the linguistic débris of alchemy and astronomy, seem unlikely to be put off by more words if their referents have interest for them. If they protest the vocabulary of psychoanalytic critics, they probably have more crucial objections. At any rate, it seems to me there are more important reasons for the distrust we set out to explain.

An easy way to account for rejection of psychoanalytic criticism is to say it meets the irrational "resistance" of readers. It is comforting to think of those you do not convince as weak or narrow-minded people fond of their illusions. But the same comfort is available to all true believers, including advocates of the "science" of Velikovsky's Worlds in Collision and the theosophy of Mme. Blavatsky. It is instructive to note that Galileo and Darwin found resistance to their ideas, but if we are tempted to take rejection as a mark of merit, let us observe that men resist falsehood as well as truth. We may also note with profit that imperfections in the ideas of Galileo and Darwin merited a degree of resistance, and ask what progress in science would have accrued had they commanded uncritical acceptance.

It would, of course, be impossible to say how much of the coldness toward psychoanalytic approaches to literary study is founded on emotional unwillingness to accept the evidence modern psychology has accumulated on the nature of man, or specifically on an aversion to the frank discussion of sex. It has been more than fifty years, however, since the publication of Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams, and it is my impression that in that time there has developed a sufficiently large body of the sympathetic and (at least partially) informed to provide a gratifying audience to the critic

who can apply his understanding of psychoanalysis with discrimination. I am convinced, at least, that in the academic world the significant reasons for disapproval are usually neither ignorance nor affective prejudice against the science itself.

Prejudice has been generated by widely publicized travesties that have passed for representatives of what the science could be used for. We have had, for example, a spate of biographies whose misdirected exploitation of ideas and methods associated with psychoanalysis should certainly inspire an attitude of extreme wariness. One thinks of Lewis Mumford's speculations on the night life of Mrs. Melville. Or one recalls the "parlor psychoanalysis" of the earlier Van Wyck Brooks, who combined it in The Ordeal of Mark Twain with just enough insight to assure its being taken seriously and enough misunderstanding and misrepresentation to discredit it. Even the useful, realtively restrained and wholly honest study of Poe by Joseph Wood Krutch has not been entirely reassuring, for near the end of the book Krutch announces, "We have, then, traced Poe's art to an abnormal condition of the nerves...."[12] In that sentence he epitomizes the fallacious thinking that has quite properly annoyed the student of literature in many a psychological analysis of writers.

The purpose of these remarks is not to introduce a discussion of the

---

12. Joseph Wood Krutch, Edgar Allan Poe, A Study in Genius, (New York, 1926), p. 234.

shortcomings of biographies written in the light of psychoanalysis.[13] It is rather to emphasize the associations that have from the first encouraged misgivings about the nature of that light. With the same end in view, attention should also be called to the effect produced by such a prodigy as Ludwig Lewisohn's Expression in America. Judged by some of its best advertised fruits, psychoanalysis has appeared unpromising.

To call the roll of literary men who have misapplied psychoanalytic theory out of half-knowledge, or a desire to be sensational, or an eagerness to make out a case, would not be enough to explain the situation. Professional psychoanalysts themselves have also frequently been undiscriminating when they have made excursions into the field of literary study. I do not here have in mind the errors into which they may fall through some lack of purely literary training. These may be charitably passed over. I refer to the failure to make reasonable distinctions, to lack of caution and a susceptibility to what are vaguely spoken of as "excesses."[14] In these respects the honors seem to be about even between literary men and professional psychoanalysts.

Let us ask what one does or can do when he attempts to apply psychoanalytic theories and methods to a piece of literature or to the whole body of an author's work. The purposes and problems are obviously different

---

13. Leon Edel (op. cit.) has also some sensible advice for biographers. It is likely that some biographers, operating on principles such as those recommended by Mr. Edel, have profited by psychoanalytical investigations that do not obtrude themselves on the reader's attention in the finished biography. As a genre, however, the "psychoanalytic biography" has a deservedly bad reputation. Stefan Zweig's Mental Healers (New York, 1932) and Jack Lindsay's Charles Dickens (London, 1949) illustrate that such biography need not be narrowly conceived or injudicious. Edward Hitschmann in "Boswell: the Biographer's Character...," Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XVII (April, 1948), 212-223, shows, also, what can be done.

14. Stanley Edgar Hyman, for instance, alludes to "the familiar excesses of psychoanalytic criticism." The Armed Vision (New York, 1948), p. 142.

from those of a clinician consulted by a patient.

We may say that both critic and clinician engage themselves to unravel meanings that are knit up with unconscious motivations. But who or what does the critic analyze? Certainly not the piece of literature itself, for ink and paper have no psyche to be explored.

It may be suggested that the characters presented in literature have a kind of life of their own. This is a type of pleasant illusion that authors like to foster and critics often applaud. Developed to pathological proportions, it leads to such monstrosities as Mrs. Clarke's Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines. Surely, a concern with non-rational psychology need not have the effect of encouraging hallucinations, yet the tenor of some psychoanalytic disquisitions suggests that more than one analyst may have in the works a volume on The Infancy of Shakespeare's Heroes. James Clark Moloney and Laurence Rockelein in "A New Interpretation of Hamlet" show that they have known the temptation. Having asserted that psychoanalytic experience proves that the unconscious guilt-feelings with which Ernest Jones had invested Hamlet would in fact have spurred th Prince on to kill Claudius, they explain that actually Hamlet did not want to kill his uncle because Claudius was a "protective figure shielding Hamlet from growing up," and under no circumstances did he "want the responsibility of becoming an adult." They then remark that "His primary fear of killing Claudius...was also magnified by certain traumatic experiences which can be read into his antecedent biography from the foregoing insights."[15]

---

15. James Clark Moloney and Laurence Rockelein, "A New Interpretation of Hamlet," International Journal of Psychoanalysis, XXX, Part 11 (1949), 94. In more hypothetical terms, of course, Ernest Jones had already supplied Hamlet with an antecedent biography. See his study in Hamlet (London: Vision Press, 1947).

To read into the interpretation of a character, the experiences, traumatic or otherwise, in an imagined antecedent biography is a beguiling possibility. Traditional critics have often been lured by it, but it is particularly seductive to those who apply psychoanalysis to character study. The reasons for its attracting them are obvious. The uneasy suspicion that they allow themselves limitless liberty in supplying a context for characters beyond that provided by the author is, however, an important factor in the widespread reluctance to take their studies seriously.

The fact is that characters in a play, poem or novel are of a different order of creation from those who may in the flesh consult the psychoanalyst. Presumably, we ought to distinguish bushes from bears.[16]

Frederic Wertham has observed that "practically every functional mental disorder has been adduced at one period or another by psychiatrists as the solution of Hamlet." He elaborated the statement by listing twenty-two separate diagnoses that have been solemnly offered as if the unfortunate Dane had been under the direct observation of so many clinicians.[17] In passing we may note the attractiveness of the reductive fallacy, and remark divergence of opinion that raises doubts about medical competence. I wish to raise, though, a question on the legitimacy of the whole proceeding. Is it rational to allege, for example, that Hamlet has an Oedipus complex?

---

16. E. E. Stoll has argued this matter out in Art and Artifice in Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1933).

17. Frederic Wertham, "The Matricidal Impulse," Journal of Criminal Psychopathology, II (April, 1941), 456.

I believe it is not a mere quibble to insist that the most we can sensibly support is the statement that he acts, under the given circumstances, as a young man tormented by such a complex might well have acted. It seems to me that it is the maintaining of such an approach that makes Wertham's own comments on Hamlet in The Dark Legend[18] so much more impressive than those of more pretentious analyses of the play.

I believe that the "psychological awareness that our own age has conferred upon us"[19] can be effectively brought to bear on the discussion of characters whose creators were mortal, but the moment we imply that we can "psychoanalyze" them or explain their motivations as if they were living beings we confront the irrefutable logic of Professor Stoll.[20] For if we ask why Hamlet delayed his revenge, we must be prepared to include among our answers the admission that Shakespeare arranged matters so.

Perhaps, then, we may hope to psychoanalyze the author. As a matter of fact, most of the writers who have applied depth psychology to literary characters have clearly had other subjects in mind. Freud's seminal remarks about Hamlet left no doubt that behind the creature he saw the creator. Ernest Jones[21] and Ella Sharpe[22] have with equal explicitness made it plain that their ultimate concern was with Shakespeare. And Arthur Wormhoudt, inspired by Edmund Bergler, assures us that Hamlet's behavior toward

---

18. Frederic Wertham, The Dark Legend (New York, 1941).
19. Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (London, 1934), 334.
20. Op. cit. I do not wish to imply general agreement with Professor Stoll's arguments on other points.
21. Ernest Jones, op. cit., p. 9.
22. Ella Sharpe, "An Unfinished Paper on Hamlet: Prince of Denmark," International Journal of Psychoanalysis, XXIX (1948), 98-109.

Ophelia and Gertrude, which looks like a manifestation of the Oedipus complex, is simply Shakespeare's personal defense "for his more deeply rooted oral conflict with the mother."[23] Similarly, we are told that Posdnischow reflects Tolstoy's "paraphiliac trend,"[24] and that Alton Locke reveals Kingsley's particular neuroses,[25] while Macbeth is an objectification of Shakespeare's fantasies of guilt relating to his son's death.[26]

Now, if the author under analysis has created more than one character, it seems reasonable to ask on what grounds it may be supposed that in one rather than another he has expressed "the core of his psychical personality."[27] When answers to this question are attempted, they are usually vague and subjective.

But after all, we are not confined in the analysis of an author to a study of his projection into one or many characters whom he may have given shape to. We may learn that Lucretius had a mother fixation,[28] or that the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes was impotent.[29] If the author, not a figment of fiction, is on the couch, why is he there, and what are the relations between him and the analyst?

The purpose of analysis cannot be therapy. Coleridge cannot now be retrieved from his addiction to opium nor Poe from his dipsomania; nor can

---

23. Arthur Wormhoudt, The Demon Lover (New York, 1950), pp. 7-8.
24. B. Karpman, "The Kreutzer Sonata, A Problem in Latent Homosexuality and Castration," Psychoanalytic Review, XXV (1938), 20.
25. Felix Deutsch, "Respiratory Neuroses in Charles Kingsley," American Imago, IV (December, 1947), 88-97.
26. Ludwig Jekels, "The Riddle of Shakespeare's Macbeth," Psychoanalytic Review, XXX (1943), 361-385.
27. The phrase is adapted from Ernest Jones, op. cit., p. 9.
28. B. J. Logre, "The Anxiety of Lucretius," Psyche IV (1949), 50.
29. Frank Zimmerman, "The Book of Ecclesiastes in the Light of Some Psychoanalytic Observations," American Imago, V (1948), 301-305.

the analyst help Shakespeare to resolve his "deeply rooted conflict with the mother." Yet it is apparently difficult not to adopt the tone of a diagnostician with an eye to improvement of the patient's behavior. Readers of psychoanalytic criticism are frequently irritated by what Charles Baudouin speaks of as an "air of medical superiority."[30]

If the purpose is not control, it is just as clearly not prediction. Presumably, the intention is simply to arrive at understanding of the author's motivations and meanings.

Even conscious motivations are complex; it is unlikely that hidden ones are less so. Yet a common characteristic in psychoanalytic criticism appears to be schematic simplification. It is the besetting sin in such criticism to make over-much of the kind of causation that might be centrally important if the end in view were therapy, overlooking the fact that when the purpose which would give certain determinants significance is altered, the significance is automatically altered. We may say that in an author's work we have a set of symptoms, but a Rudolf Eckstein has pointed out, "the symptom really is determined through an unlimited series of causes."[31] The traditional scholar, whatever his own shortcomings, cannot fail to be annoyed by a reading that finds *the* answer to the "riddle" of *Macbeth* in Shakespeare's fantasies of guilt about the death of his son--- even if they were reactivated by the death of the barren Elizabeth.[32]

---

30. Charles Baudouin, *Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul (London, 1924), p. 33. But note Baudouin's protest that such an air need not be adopted.

31. Rudolf Eckstein, "The Tower of Babel in Psychology and Psychiatry...." *American Imago*, VII (July, 1950), 115.

32. Ludwig Jekels, *op. cit.* It further seems clear that the present state of development in the science of psychology does not justify dogmatism in theoretical explanations. The sectarianism among suggests that there are numerous areas of uncertainty. Freud, to the end of his life, continued to revise his own doctrines, and his reference to "our mythology" implies his recognition that he and his associates dealt in useful constructs that may be altered or discarded. See his *New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1933), p. 131.

Perhaps, however, those who apply psychoanalysis to the study of an author recognize the relativity of the importance of various kinds of motivation and do not intend the impression they often give. We may still ask, what practicing psychoanalyst would presume to behave with an actual patient as many seem anxious to behave with Wordsworth, or Poe, or Tolstoy?

If on the basis of a given amount of writing by and about a man, a dependable psychoanalytic diagnosis could be arrived at, we might initiate psychoanalysis by mail-order and merchandise it through Sears Roebuck and Company. But how can such a diagnosis be achieved? The writer who is not present in the flesh will not develop his free associations; if he has dreamed dreams, he will reveal no more of them than he has already seen fit to set down on paper; he will not give himself away in the quality of his voice or a muscle twitch or the hesitation that might mark inhibition. I do not mean to imply that we can learn nothing about an author by following out the hints which psychoanalysis gives us. To the contrary, we may discover much and conjecture a great deal more. When mere conjecture is presented in the same tone of conviction as verifiable fact, as it often is, we need not wonder if the judicious reader receives the report with some suspicion. It seems to me that in psychoanalytic criticism there has not been sufficiently clear and consistent distinction maintained between what is only possibly true and what would pass the reasonable tests for credibility.

Deprived of the advantages of the kind of evidence a living patient provides, lacking particularly the crucial test of success or failure in therapy, the psychoanalyst (whether professional or literary) who studies an

author through his writing is at a great disadvantage. If the author will not speak, the analyst must speak for him. The analyst must supply the associations that an image suggest; he must dream the dreams; he must see the "possible puns;" he must make the identifications. Who, actually, is being psychoanalyzed? Perhaps it is the critic who occupies the couch.

I cannot help feeling that it is the recognition that often the psychoanalytic critic, while he professes to be bringing science to bear on a piece of literature, is really talking about himself that accounts for a lack of sympathy in many readers. In Marie Bonaparte's analysis of Poe,[33] for example, we have a great deal of evidence about Mme. Bonaparte that we can accept as dependable, while much of what she tells us about Poe is questionable in the extreme. We may be interested to learn, for instance, that for her "The Purloined Letter" symbolizes a stolen penis, but what significance it may have had in Poe's unconscious we will never know.

A symbol, by its nature, can carry any of an infinite number of meanings. Surface contexts provide manageable limits of potentialities for traditional interpretation. But suppose we exploit our understanding of repression, displacement, condensation, inversion, and transference; suppose we insist that the opposite of what is said is unconsciously meant, and that psychic defenses may be several layers deep. May we not find grounds for any interpretation that pleases us?

This argument should not be misconstrued. There is obviously a possibility of uncovering in a piece of literature meanings that were present in the author's mind though he may have been unaware of them. Edward A. Armstrong, in Shakespeare's Imagination: A Study of the Psychology of Association and Inspiration, has shown how Miss Spurgeon's more mechanical study of imagery may be extended with profit.[34] It is possible to find tests,

33. Marie Bonaparte, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe (New York, 1949).

34. Edward A. Armstrong, Shakespeare's Imagination ... (London, 1946).

such as those of recurrence and associations in clusters, that prevent an investigation of an author's imagery from being mainly subjective. Surely it would be possible to find reasonable checks on subjectivity in other types of inquiry that attempt to take us beneath the surface of a writer's mind.

Still more important, however, it should not be supposed that if the critic is on the couch he position is necessarily awkward. It is only if he pretends he is not there that objection may justly be raised. After all, what the author meant when he wrote may be less important to us than the meanings we do or may attach to what he wrote. That is to say, meaning has residence in the minds of readers.[35] The meanings of a piece of literature may have for the critic informed in depth psychology can be useful to all of us, though their relative value will depend on the quality of his mind. Only, let him be clear about what he is doing, and not misrepresent his activity.

There is still another answer possible when we ask who is analyzed in psychoanalytic criticism. Recalling that once the author is dead the meaning of what he wrote can exist only in the minds of readers, we can say that psychoanalysis had a great deal to contribute through examination of those minds in their relations to the piece of literature. In other words,

---

35. I do not wish to be misunderstood as deprecating inquiry into what the author intended. That is one approach to finding what meaning it may have for us. Nor do I agree with Arthur Wormhoudt (op. cit., p. 14) that "any full and coherent interpretation of a work of art has value regardless of the truth or falsity of the scientific data on which it rests," unless a special definition is given to "value" or the statement is extended to show to whom the value accrues. What value has Diana Pittman's full and coherent interpretation of the works of Poe as a "coded allegory ...of propagandist efforts in connection with British Reform?" (See Philip Young, "The Earlier Psychologists and Poe," American Literature, XXII, (1951), 443-444).

you and I may be the subjects of analysis. As a matter of fact, is it not true that the most impressive (and useful) criticism is that which reveals ourselves to ourselves? Again, however, the critic ought to be clear about what he is saying. For what a work of art may mean to the generality of readers may be different from what it suggests to a particular critic and from what it meant to its creator. When decent distinctions are respected, when discriminate interpretations are made, and when judicious caution controls the critic, his applications of psychoanalysis to literature can yield fruit that will be valued.

Note what happens when the critic admits that he is exploring his own mind or marking out paths of exploration for the reader. If Arthur Wormhoudt tells us that he identifies Geraldine with the phallic mother, and that his identification is reinforced by his recollection that her name means "'spear-wielder' according to its Teutonic origin,"[36] we can credit the report as a statement of fact about Wormhoudt. Or if he suggests that in the phrase "gossamer sails" we can "perhaps" see a pun on "'gossamere' (French gosse, boy; mère (mother),"[37] we are free to consider the suggestion. The question then is whether we find, for ourselves, some significance in the possibility. We are not forced to draw conclusions about Coleridge——or Wormhoudt.

The immense advantage of the psychoanalytical critic who has regard for the distinctions that have been recommended is illustrated in the work of Maud Bodkin.[38] Though her readers will, perhaps, not wish to accept all that she has had to say, they will find it readily possible to separate the

---

36. Arthur Wormhoudt, op. cit. p. 27.
37. Ibid., p. 34.
38. Maud Bodkin, op. cit.

useful from what they may question, for she has not intertwined fact with fantasy nor dogma with the demonstrable, and she has respected the reasonable limitations under which she has worked. And though her own scope of interest and understanding is broad, she is disarmingly modest, avoiding "insistent judgments of the 'nothing but' type."

Too frequently, however, it has seemed that critics have attempted to stretch their subject on the Procrustean bed of preconceived theory, to represent possibility for fact, to mistake the subject of their inquiry, and to make out a case by means of what Kenneth Burke calls the "heads I win, tails you lose mechanism."[39] Nobody who wishes to explain his doubts about the use of psychoanalysis in literary study is at a loss for some ridiculous piece of speculation or some fine piece of unreason in action to point to as he says, "See, that is what I mean by psychoanalytic criticism."

Yet there have also been a respectable number of excellent studies that have contributed to our resources for understanding and appreciation. They have indicated what can be accomplished when we make reasonable use of "the psychological awareness that our own age has conferred on us." Some such studies are buried in the files of special journals, along with many others that could well remain interred there; others are in books that have had little general circulation; very few are widely known. In addition to

---

39. Kenneth Burke, Counter-statement (New York, 1931), p. 93 n.: "Having defined the nature of a man's psychosis, they can fit any act into the scheme. For if the act follows the same pattern as the psychosis, they can explain it as consistent---but if it does not follow the pattern, they can account for it as 'sublimated' or 'compensatory.'"

work of Armstrong and Bodkin, some that have come to my attention are Hanns Sachs' admirable essay on "The Measure in Measure for Measure,"[40] Freud's "Dostoyevsky and Parricide,"[41] Roy P. Basler's interpretation of Tennyson's Maud,[42] certain sections of Leonard Manheim's The Dickens Pattern,[43] a chapter in Kenneth Burke's The Philosophy of Literary Form,[44] and Ernst Kris's "Prince Hal's Conflict."[45]

It is regrettable that no attempt has been made to rescue the useful essays from obscurity. It would be gratifying to have easily accessible a collection representative of the best that has been done, to which we could point and say, "See, that is what I mean by good psychoanalytical criticism."

---

40. In The Creative Unconscious (Cambridge, Mass., 1942).
41. In Collected Papers, Vol. 5 (London, 1950).
42. In Sex, Symbolism and Psychology (New Brunswick, N. J., 1948).
43. (Columbia dissertation, 1948).
44. (Baton Rouge, 1941).
45. The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XVII (1948), 487-506.

Additional Subscribers

With the addition of the following four subscribers who have added their names to our list for our first year's issues, we now have a subscription list to the NEWS-LETTER of forty-two. Our list includes members of faculty and students from all parts of the United States, physicians, psychoanalysts, and professional writers----truly a cross-section of those interested in the complex interrelationships between psychology and literature. We welcome as our latest subscribers:

Lawrence Babb
Department of English
Michigan State College
East Lansing, Michigan

Carvel Collins
Department of English
Mass. Inst. of Technology
(Home) 74 Buckingham Street
Cambridge 38, Mass.

Louis Fraiberg
661 Covington Drive
Detroit 3, Michigan
(Grad. student, Univ. of Michigan)

Burton R. Pollin
Department of English
The City College
139th Street and Convent Avenue
New York 31, N. Y.